

Weekly Column for February 24, 2005

As February reluctantly comes to close next week, I thought I would take a moment and recognize one of Troy's lesser-recognized citizens from more than a century ago, and who was honored earlier this month by the City Council as part of Black History Month.

Way back in 1877, Garnet Baltimore entered Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute to study civil engineering. Four years later he would become the first African American graduate of the prestigious university, and would go on to do great things. The following is a brief description of his history from the RPI website:

Garnet D. Baltimore graduated from Rensselaer in 1881, as our first African-American alumnus. Born in Troy, New York in 1859, Baltimore attended the Troy Academy and entered Rensselaer in 1877 to study engineering. Upon graduation, he worked as a civil engineer on several local projects, including: building bridges, railroads, canals, and waterways in and around New York State. Perhaps Baltimore's most notable and long-standing contribution to Troy was his landscape design of Troy's Prospect Park.

Along with Frear Park, Prospect Park is one of the true recreational jewels the City of Troy owns and operates, and we have Garnet Baltimore to thank for that. I've been to many places in my life, and still the layout, beauty, and immensity Prospect Park has still amazes me each time I enter it.

One website I was reading concerning Baltimore, described his actions of designing the park as such:

(It is) 84 acres of elegant nature. When private land was bought by the city, Baltimore was hired to conceive and design a park that could be enjoyed for leisure activities by all Troy's residents. He created a circular landscape with "winding roads and walks," gardens, a playground, a tennis court, pool, and an overlook which offered a breathtaking 25-mile view of the Hudson Valley.

How true. We owe a lot to Mr. Baltimore for that reason alone. That is why this month the City Council representatives passed a resolution ceremonially renaming the section of Eighth Street of Hoosick to Congress Street, as Garnet Douglass Baltimore Street. Later this year we will have a public unveiling of the street sign, which we hope will remain forever as a lasting tribute to a Trojan who gave so much to his community.

Have a great weekend.

Mayor Harry J Tutunjian